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ABSTRACT

Although content related questions may indicate the depth of a readers' understanding of a passage, they do not necessarily help readers develop more general strategies for extracting information from print. A program of strategies to develop comprehension skills should include prereading instruction, activities that increase awareness of written language, and tasks that make explicit the cohesive structures within the text. Prereading instruction should consist of activities such as oral discussion, paper and pencil exercises, and the eliciting of personal experiences related to the content of the reading selection. Such activities should draw on the relevant aspects of the pupil's background experiences to activate the appropriate schemata. Cloze exercises, in which the reader restores deleted words to a text passage, can develop the reader's awareness of language and perception of cohesion in the text. This method emphasizes structure over content. Follow-up activities will help students perceive the language related intuitions they have relied upon in completing the cloze passage. Question and answer discussions are probably the most direct means of keeping a cloze experience within the context of the passage. (Cloze follow-up questions are appended.) (HTH)

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Enhancing Comprehension through Analysis of Text:
A Practical Framework

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ENHANCING COMPREHENSION THROUGH ANALYSIS OF TEXT: A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditionally, readers have demonstrated their comprehension of a written passage by restating its main ideas or by responding to a set of content-related questions. These activities shed light on the depth of the reader's understanding of a particular passage. However, they do not necessarily aid readers in developing more general strategies for extracting information from print. Analysis of the structure of a prose passage may be a powerful tool for that end.

While content is passage-dependent, well-written text coheres in ways that are independent of content. It is these cohesive ties which make a prose passage readable and comprehensible. Readers who are able to identify the cohesive structures within a particular text may use this ability to increase their comprehension of any text.

In this paper a set of strategies* to develop comprehension skills which are applicable to any reading task will be proposed. Such a program may include a) preparation for comprehension through pre-reading instruction, b) activities which increase awareness of written language, and c) tasks which make explicit the cohesive structures within text. Each of these strategies will be discussed in the foregoing sections.

* The activities suggested in this paper have been used by teachers and teacher trainers with high school and elementary school students enrolled in the public schools of New York City. As a result of our observations and feedback, certain changes in format and directions were made. The activities, as they are described and illustrated, were found to be motivating and effective aids to comprehension.

Setting the State for Reading

Each learner comes to the reading task with his or her own view of the world, a particular schema or structure of knowledge with which new information is integrated (Anderson, 1978).

Pre-reading experiences, such as Pearson's semantic mapping (1978), Herber's structured overview (1978), Ausubel's advance organizers (1960), set the stage for increased comprehension and effective processing of written communications by activating this schema and providing a cognitive framework within which the reader can interact with the material. This framework may be established in a variety of ways. It may relate to the content of the passage; it may be organizational in nature; or it may activate the thinking and language skills requisite to full comprehension of the selection.

Pre-reading instruction should be purposeful and focused. It may consist of activities such as oral discussion, paper and pencil exercises, and /or the elicitation of personal experiences related to the content of the reading selection. Whatever the form of the activity organizer, it should be designed to a) draw on relevant aspects of the pupil's background experiences, b) activate the schemata with which pupils will address the content, and c) bring these factors into contact with the focus of the upcoming task. In this sense, pre-reading instruction functions as a catalyst whose primary objective is to stimulate thought.

The format for pre-reading instruction may vary according to the age of the reader and the nature of the reading task. For example, readers may be provided with a synopsis of the content plus a series of open-ended questions which lead them to link its main concepts to their own experiences (See Figure 1). Alternatively, pupils may be asked to group and sort details which are related to the content (See Figure 2). They may also be led to solve problems or puzzles which draw on the comprehension subskills built into the reading selection (i.e. making comparison, perceiving cause and effect relationships, determining

time order sequencing). (See Figure 3)

Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Figure 2 about here

Insert Figure 3 about here

In addition, pre-reading activities may be used to prepare learners for utilizing their knowledge of language structure. For example, preparation for cloze activities may include exercises which focus on syntactic categories. Figure 4 illustrates a possible preparatory activity for a modified cloze passage in which verbs have been deleted.

Insert Figure 4 about here

Increasing Awareness of Language Structure Through Cloze

While the cloze procedure* has become a well known and popular device in reading instruction, the linguistic properties underlying its

*Cloze is a method by which words are systematically deleted in a written passage, requiring the reader to restore the original text.

value are not always as well known. In order to restore deleted words in a passage, readers must utilize their knowledge of language, particularly its semantic associations, syntactic structures and vocabulary. For example, in order to supply the deleted words ambulance and out in Figure 5, the reader makes use of the contextually strong nouns, sirens, and accident, along with his/her intuitions about the syntactic collocation of function words.

Insert Figure 5 about here

These responses reflect Finn's analysis (1977-78) of cloze easiness, in which he points out that success in cloze responses depends primarily on two features of the text; the co-occurrence of high frequency words and the association of rare words in a particular context.

A reader's intuitive knowledge of semantic associations and syntactic structures is a direct help in formulating correct cloze responses. Indirect help is provided by the reader's sensitivity to the cohesive ties within and between text sentences. These include pronoun reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical association. An implicit awareness of these ties or linkages facilitates the reader's ability to restore a cloze passage correctly. For example, in order to restore the the underlined words in Figure 6, readers draw upon their understanding of inter- and intra- sentential (i.e. Home is synonymous with and substituted for house) pronoun references, lexical substitution/ and lexical association(i.e. Haunted is associated with ghosts).

Insert Figure 6 about here

Helping the Reader Perceive Cohesion in Text

The mere act of filling the blanks in a reading selection - even if

done correctly - may provide a clue to reading level, (Bormuth, 1969; Page, 1977; Rankin, 1962), but will not necessarily result in more general comprehension growth. The value of the cloze procedure as an instructional device rests chiefly in its being a stimulus for bringing into conscious consideration the cohesive ties within text. (Grant, 1979) This may be accomplished through specially designed follow-up activities in which readers explain, justify, and explore the reasons for their cloze restorations. These activities bring to light the readers' thought processes as they proceed through the passage and make explicit the inter-sentential links, cross references and other cohesive ties within the text.

The exercises themselves may take several forms. Question-and-answer discussions are perhaps the most direct means of contextualizing a cloze experience. These may develop from questions such as a. and b.

- a. Which word(s) in the sentence(s) before (after)
blank number (2) helped you decide how to fill that
blank?
- b. Why would the word (tons) in the sentence following
blank number (2) suggest that gigantic is the correct
answer for blank number (2)?

Questions may also focus closely on the anaphoric references within text, such as c. and d. below.

- c. Reread the sentence which contains blank (2).
What does the word (it) refer to in that sentence?
- d. How did this information help you decide on the correct
answer for blank (2)?

If function words are deleted from a passage, questions such as e and f. help readers identify the sentence-level syntactic clues in which their response might be based.

- e. Look at the word that follows blank (2). What kind of
word is it, a noun, a verb an adjective?
- f. What kind of words often come before nouns? What are
examples of those words?

Pencil and paper activities mirror the objectives of oral discussions and may take on one or more formats. A multiple choice scheme is particularly adaptable. See Figures 7 and 8 below.

Insert Figure 7 about here

Insert Figure 8 about here

Carefully phrased thought questions may also fulfill the same function. In this case, the objective would be for the reader to use the information contained in one or more specific restorations to think through an answer to the question. See Figure 9.

Insert Figure 9 about here

While each of these formats provides a different option for integrating cloze methodology into a comprehension program, they share the common denominator of focusing on structure over content. With the exception of the exercise in Figure 9, all the suggested activities are content independent. Their objectives are to help readers see the integral structure of a given text as practice with a strategy for "linking" up with any text.

Summary

Comprehension of written material derives from an integration of prior knowledge with new learning plus an intuitive awareness of the structures of the text. While the former has been traditionally a focus of instruction in reading comprehension, the important role of the latter has often been neglected.

This paper has endeavored to provide a practical framework for comprehension growth in which the analysis of text may be carried out alongside the analysis of content. In doing so, a three-pronged approach involving strategies for implementation before, during and after the reading task has been suggested. These strategies include a) a set of pre-reading activities which serve to activate readers' schemata and provide the back drop against which readers address the reading task, b) a reading passage modified by the cloze procedure, and c) a set of follow-up activities which help students perceive the language-related intuitions they have relied upon in completing the cloze passage.

While many able readers may draw upon these resources intuitively, the activities suggested within this paper can help classroom teachers insure that all readers are aware of the resources that they bring to the reading task.

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Figure Captions

- Figure 1. Pre-Reading Activity: A Selection Summary
- Figure 2. Pre-reading Activity: Grouping and Sorting Details Related to the Selection
- Figure 3. Pre-reading Activity: Comprehension Subskill in the Selection
- Figure 4. Pre-Cloze Activity: Language Cues - Verbs
- Figure 5. Cloze passage (a)
- Figure 6. Cloze passage (b)
- Figure 7. Cloze Follow-up (a) : Justifying a Response
- Figure 8. Cloze Follow-up (b) : Justifying a Response
- Figure 9. Cloze Follow-up (c) : Using Deleted Information

A Summary.

Read this summary. Then answer the questions.

Gesturing is language without words. Just as different words have different meanings the same gesture may mean different things in different cultures.

1. How can you say "Yes" without using words?
2. How can you tell that people are angry by looking at them?
3. When are you most likely to use non-verbal language?

Read the article below to find out more about gestures and communication.

Grouping and Sorting.

Which of the following expressions can you communicate with gestures?

Write those expressions on the lines provided. Be ready to explain or justify your answer.

Yes, I'd love to go.

Come on, let's leave.

Is that a new coat?

Don't do that.

Just a minute!

It's freezing in here.

Listen to me.

Happy Birthday?

Thinking Strategy.

Compare the three people in the pictures below. Circle the picture which shows the happiest person. Be ready to explain the clues you used to make your choice.



Language Cues: Verbs.

Write the verb or verbs that could complete each sentence so that the sentence makes sense. Be ready to explain which verbs name actions and which verbs describe a process.

The dog _____	ran
The Children _____	laughed
The dog _____	broke
	dried

Cloze Passage (a)

The sirens rang out as the ambulance raced to the scene of the accident. Everyone who was in earshot rushed out of their houses.

Cloze Passage (b)

The Smith's moved to a new house. They thought it would ~~make~~ a good home, but it turned out be haunted. The whole place was a playground for ghosts.

Justifying a Response (a).

a. Write the word you chose to fill blank (2):

b. Underline the phrase or phrases from the reading selection that helped you make your choice.

1. (in the morning)
2. (once it started)
3. (unable to carry)
4. (too heavy)

Justifying a Response (b)

a. Write the word you chose to fill blank (2):

b. Underline the reason for your word choice, or write your own reason.

1. The heavy statue could not be lifted.

2. Stone is not fragile material.

3. _____
(your reasons)

Using Deleted Information.

Answer the question in one or more complete sentences. The number or numbers after the question refer to blanks in the article. You may wish to use the information contained in words you chose to fill the blank(s) in answering the question.

Why were the statues transported in
such an unusual way? (2)
